

Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors through Routines and Classroom Schedules

What are schedules and routines?

Schedules refer to what you do each day in your classroom, who will do what and when it will be done. It's obvious that a classroom needs a schedule to keep things on track during the day. However, consistently following the schedule can help reduce challenging behaviors by making your classroom predictable for the children. Children feel more comfortable when they can predict what will happen next. Children who know what will happen next are less likely to misbehave!

Routines are activities that happen within your schedule. They occur on a regular basis and usually involve a series of steps. During routines children learn about the sequence of activities, begin to anticipate what will happen next and become more independent. One example of a daily routine is your naptime routine and all the steps involved: children go to the bathroom, gather their blankets, take off their shoes, lie on their cot and listen to music. Children feel more comfortable when they know the steps that are expected of them. Children who understand the steps in the routines are less likely to misbehave!

Why are schedules and routines important?

Studies have shown that schedules and routines influence many aspects of children's development (emotional, cognitive, and social). Predictable schedules help young children feel secure, safe and comfortable. Schedules and routines actually help reduce behavior problems, such as tantrums and aggression.

A well-planned schedule can encourage children to be more actively involved in their play. Be sure to include activities that allow children to make choices, activities that are individualized for children's special interests and/or needs and a balance of the planned activities, including small vs. large groups, quiet times vs. active times, teacher directed vs. child directed and indoor vs. outdoor. Children who are more actively involved in play are less likely to misbehave!

What can you do in your classroom?

At the beginning of the year, you can teach your children the schedule by using a picture schedule, which is a daily classroom schedule that includes clear pictures of the activities since young children can't read! You can also create picture routine guides to help children learn the steps of a daily routine. Post these schedules and guides so children can refer to them, become familiar with them and become more independent. If changes occur in the schedules, don't forget to talk about those changes at the beginning of the day to help children feel secure and understand what is expected of them.

When planning your schedules and classroom routines, consider the following factors: the balance of activities, the pace of activities, young children's attention span, when your children are most alert and the number of teachers available. It's important that your daily schedule include uninterrupted child-selected play periods of at least 30 minutes. Children need a block of time to become absorbed in their 'work' without being required to move to another center or activity.

Research on this topic:

The length of time you allow for children to play can positively affect the quality of the play; a play period that is longer than 30 minutes results in higher levels of social and cognitive play. Children who are allowed to focus on a task through extended play actually learn more from the activity.

Food for thought:

Put yourself in the children's shoes: Have you ever been in a work situation where you didn't know what would happen from one day to the next and you never knew what was expected of you? You might get off at 4:00 or maybe 5:00. You might be paid on the 15th or maybe the 20th. Could you be your best in that situation? Let's strive to bring out the best in all children by helping them understand the classroom schedule and routines.

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